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THE TIDINGS TO OLAF.

BY BLISS CARMAN.

*This is a question arose in the Norse land long ago,
About the time of Yule, the season of joy and snow.
To-morrow, our Christmas Day, can you answer straight and true,
After these thousand years, when the question comes to you?*

Olaf sat on his throne, and the priest of Thor stood by;
And the King's eyes were gray as the December sky.

“Whom shall we serve, O King—the god of thy fathers, Thor,
Who made us lords of the sea, and gave us our land in war,

“Who follows our battle flag over the barren brine,
Who braces the bursting heart when the rowers bend in line,

“Who hath made us the fear of the world and the envy of the
earth,
Whose splendor sustains us in death, who hath given us plenty
for dearth—

“Or this poor, thought-ridden Jew, an outcast whose head was
priced
At thirty pieces of silver, this friendless anarchist, Christ?

“Is not thine empire spread over the Western Isles?
Are not thy people sown wherever the sun-path smiles?

“Do there **not** come to thee iron and gems and corn?
Does **not thy** glory blaze wherever our trade is borne?

"Over the red sea-rim thy galleys go down with the sun;
Beyond the gates of the storm thy written mandates run.

"Behold, new lands arise to the lift of thy daring prow,
And health and riches and joy prosper thy fir-built house.

"Is there lack to thee of aught the strength of thy folk can give,
When the will and the longing come to stretch out thy hand and
live?

"Honey and fruit and wine, are they not piled on the board?
Do not a hundred tribes pay tribute to our Lord?

"Olaf, beloved of the gods! Is there an outland tongue,
Is there an isle of the sea where thy praise has not been sung?

"Scarlet and silk and gold gleam on thy breast and brow.
Had the Kings of the earth of old such honor and freedom as
thou?

"Might and dominion and power and majesty, are they not thine?
Will the seed of warrior Kings dishonor the war-god's shrine?

"O King, do I speak this day in thy name, or forevermore
Let perish the ancient creed? By thy grace, is it Christ or
Thor?"

Olaf sat on his throne. And the Priest of Thor gave place
To a pale, dark monk. All eyes were bent on the stranger's
face.

"O King, how shall I speak and answer this wisdom of eld?
Yet new trees of the forest spring up where the old are felled.

"When the sombre and ancient firs are laid in the dust, in your
North,
The tender, young green of the birch and the delicate aspen put
forth.

"Is the land left naked and bare, because the brush-fires have run?
Ye have seen the soft carpet of fern spread down where the black-
ening was done.

"With beauty God covers the ground, no acre too poor to befriend,
That thou and I and all men may perceive and comprehend.

"He carries the sea in His hand, He lights the stars in the sky,
And whispers over thy soul as the shadows move on the rye.

"The King has his kingly state, but his heart is the heart of man,
Swept over by clouds of grief, then sunlit with joy for a span.

"And every living spirit that is clothed with flesh and bone
Is just so much of God's being, His presence revealed and known.

"We are part of God's breath, as the gust, whereby thy hearth-fire
is fanned,
Is part of the wild north-wind that rolls the breakers to land.

"We are part of His life, as the waves are a part of the sea,
A moment uplift in the sun, then merged in eternity.

"What is it, O man and King, that stretches between us twain,
Like the living tides that girdle the isles of the main?

"What lifts thy name, Olaf, aloft on the shout of thy folk in war?
What keeps it warm by the hearth? Is it the favor of Thor?

"No! 'Tis the love of thy people, the great common love of thy
kind,
The thing that is old as the sun and stronger than the wind.

"And, Olaf, all these things, these goods which thy priest
proclaims,
That make thee a lord among men, and give thee a name above
names,

"Are gifts of the spirit of love. Take away love, and thy throne
Melts like a word on the air, thou art a name unknown.

"Is the King heavy at heart, and no man can tell him why,
What does his glory avail to put the heaviness by?

"But, like any poor nameless man among men, the mighty King
Is heartened among his folk by the simple love they bring.

"Is the King weary in mind, and none can lighten his mood;
What cheers him to power anew but thought of his people's good?

"To love, to know, and to do! So we grow perfect apace,
The human made more divine, as the old to the new gives place.

"But who will show us the way, be lantern and staff and girth?
Where is the Light of the World and the Sweetness of the Earth?

"The King has a thousand men, yet one more brave than the rest;
The King has a hundred bards, yet one the wisest and best;

"The King has a score of friends, yet one most accounted of.
And now, if these three were one, in courage, in wisdom and love,

"There were the matchless friend, whose cause should enlist all
lands,
Gentle, intrepid, and true. And there, O King, Christ stands.

"Freedom and knowledge and joy, not mine nor any man's,
But open to all the earth, without prescription or bans,

"Where is the bringer of these? His hand is upon thy door;
And He who knocks, O King, is a greater God than Thor.

"Olaf, 'tis Yule in the world; the old creeds groan and fall,
The ice of doubt at their heart, the snows of fear over all.

"But now, even now, O friends, deep down in the kindly earth,
Are not the marvellous seeds awaiting the hour of birth?

“Even now in the sunlit places, do not the saplings prepare
To unfold their new growth to the light, unsheathe their rich
buds on the air?

“And so, from the dark, sweet mold of the human heart will arise,
To enmorning the world with light and this life emparadise,

“The deathless, young glory of love. And valley and hill and
plain
And fields and cities of men, they shall not sorrow again.

“For there shall be freedom and peace and beauty in that far
spring,
And folk shall go forth without fear, and be glad at their work
and sing.

“And men will hallow this day with His name who died on the
tree,
For the cause of eternal love, in the service of liberty.

“O King, shall the feet of Truth come in through thy open door,
Or alone out of all the world be debarred? Is it Christ or Thor?”

The King sat on his throne, and the two priests stood by;
And Olaf's eyes grew mild as a blue April sky.

*Thus were the tidings to Olaf brought in the early days,
To be a lamp in his house, and a sign-post in the ways. ·
And you, O men and women, does it concern you at all,
That Truth still cries at the cross-roads, and you do not heed his
call?*

BLISS CARMAN.